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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

12 September 1949

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 218

SUBJECT: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Hoxha Regime in Albania

1. Although the factors contributing to the instability of the Albanian regime are such that the overthrow of the Hoxha Government at any time must be considered a possibility, it is estimated that such an eventuality is unlikely this fall. Direct overthrow from the outside is improbable. Tito, despite some belligerent statements on his part, would have to weigh the consequences of Soviet retaliation in event of any overt move. The Greeks, despite recent statements of the Minister of War, must take into consideration contrary US advice, the opportunity furnished Tito to further his own designs in Albania, and possible adverse reaction in the UN. Soviet aid and controls, and Soviet pressure on Tito, together with the current capabilities of the Albanian military and security forces will probably serve to dissuade Yugoslavia, Greece, or Albanian exile groups from attempting to unseat the unstable Hoxha regime this fall. A purely internal Albanian uprising at this time is not indicated, and, if undertaken, would have little chance of success.

2. The following factors contribute to the weakness of the Albanian regime: (a) The growing threat of Tito's exploitation of the sizable Albanian minority in Yugoslavia against Hoxha; (b) Albania's physical isolation from the Cominform bloc as a result of the Tito-Cominform break; (c) public pressure in Greece for eliminating Albania as a base for guerrilla operations; (d) the widespread hostility of the Albanian people towards Hoxha and Communism in general; (e) the growing unity of Albanian exile groups as indicated by the recent formation of a "Council of Liberation"; (f) the extreme poverty of the Albanian people, for which they hold the Hoxha regime partially responsible; (g) the relative lack of Albanian ethnic, cultural, and national unity; (h) the existence of disruptive nationalism within the Albanian Communist Party; and (i) the difficulty of exercising effective control over dissident and rebellious tribesmen in the mountainous border regions, particularly in the north.

3. Greatly strengthened Soviet control measures over Albania during the past year indicate not only Soviet awareness of the basic weakness of its

Note: This paper was prepared by CIA subsequent to consultation with specialists in the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force but has not been formally coordinated.

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position in Albania, but also the great importance which Moscow attaches to maintaining a pro-Soviet regime in the isolated satellite. Aside from the great blow to Soviet and Communist prestige which a second satellite defection would cause, the Yugoslav rupture has greatly magnified the strategic importance of Albania to the USSR as (a) a base for flanking operations against Tito; (b) the chief Cominform base for maintaining the guerrilla movement in Greece; (c) a potential Soviet maritime stronghold with access to the Mediterranean; and (d) a potential supply base for the support of Italian Communism.

4. The Kremlin has, therefore, resorted to strong measures to assure its continued domination of Albania. Repeated and thorough purges of both Government and Party have greatly reduced the potential capabilities of any anti-Cominform nationalists. (Premier Hoxha himself is reportedly fearful of being summarily replaced by the Kremlin.) Current Soviet supervision of Albania's internal affairs, security units, and armed forces is the most open and direct in the Soviet orbit. Russian, and to a lesser extent, Bulgarian, military and technical "advisers" are installed in key positions. Current estimates of the number of Soviet military and civil officials in Albania range upward from 500, and it is believed that an increase in Soviet personnel has occurred recently. The Soviet bloc is reliably reported to have dispatched approximately 60 ships displacing a total of 250,000 tons to Albania in the first seven months of 1949. A sizable share of their cargo has consisted of military supplies in the form of artillery, tanks, and military vehicles. It is estimated that enough wheat (mostly from the USSR) has been stockpiled in Albania to provide the basic grain ration for the population for six months. Thus the Hoxha regime has a sizable grain reserve which can be used in an emergency to alleviate popular discontent.

5. The Kremlin is continuing to strengthen the Albanian Army and security forces, which are estimated to total approximately 80,000, consisting primarily of three army divisions, loyal to the regime and of relatively high morale.

6. Despite the deep-seated antagonism of the population, therefore, the Hoxha regime appears capable of coping with the sporadic Albanian resistance activities, most prevalent on the Yugoslav-Albanian border. A purely internal Albanian uprising at this time is not indicated, and, if undertaken, would have little chance of success.

7. The possibility of foreign intervention, in conjunction with the widespread popular unrest and anti-government hostility, however, represents a serious threat to the regime. Official Albanian fears of both Yugoslavia and Greece appear to have increased greatly during the past month. Recent statements by Albanian and other Cominform leaders have revealed unmistakable concern lest Tito attempt a coup against Albania. Moreover, recent Greek popular hostility against Albania has apparently aroused considerable anxiety in the Albanian Government, to a point where Hoxha is rumored to have proposed to his

Soviet advisers that guerrillas entering Albania either be interned or transshipped to Bulgaria, where they could reenter Greece. Recent reports indicate that Albanian internment of the guerrillas may already be taking place.

8. Greek military action against Albania is unlikely, in view of (a) continued US advice against such action, (b) the possibility that Tito might thereby find a pretext to further his own designs in Albania, and (c) the prospect that any Greek military venture against Albania would tend to strengthen the Albanian case in the UN while weakening that of Greece. Greece does not seem disposed to promote its territorial claims on the northern Epirus region by military means, and Greek ability to stage an internal Albanian coup is considered negligible.

9. Any Greek Army offensive activity against guerrillas operating along the Albanian border could provide Tito with an opportunity to unseat the Albanian Cominformists by means of an internal coup, on the pretext of saving the Albanian People's Democracy from the "Monarcho-Fascists" of Greece, and Tito has reportedly been preparing the groundwork for an anti-Cominform coup in Albania during the past year. Anti-Hoxha resistance groups have been formed and trained from among the 400,000 Kossovar minority in Yugoslavia, as well as from the growing number of Albanian refugees. Border incidents between the two countries have steadily increased since the beginning of 1949. Furthermore, Tito's assertive stand against the Cominform and his Skoplje statement implying Yugoslav aid to resistance groups in both Albania and Bulgaria may indicate that he is seriously considering the elimination of what constitutes a potential Cominform menace on his southern flank. Before undertaking such a move, however, Tito would weigh carefully the risks of Soviet retaliation, even though such a venture could perhaps be camouflaged as an internal Albanian affair.

10. Without strong foreign support and a base of operations in either Yugoslavia or Greece, the diverse refugee groups abroad which have recently formed an Albanian Committee of Liberation are unlikely to constitute a serious threat to the stability of Hoxha's government. It is doubtful whether either the Greek or Yugoslav governments would offer any support to the rightist and nationalist elements making up the Albanian exiles. Moreover, it is questionable whether these groups could succeed in submerging their differences and mutual antagonisms sufficiently to form an effective anti-Hoxha organization.